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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000591

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SUNNI ARAB LEADERS' REACTION TO SAMARA BOMBING
STRONG BUT MIXED

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: On February 23, Sunni Arab Tawafuq leaders refused to join President Talabani at a gathering of top Iraqi government officials in response to sectarian violence that followed the February 22 bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samara. At an afternoon press conference, Tawafuq leader Tariq al-Hashimi blamed the Shi'a-led United Iraqi Coalition (UIC) for attacks on Sunni mosques and demanded a halt to the violence before discussions can continue. The private reaction from Sunni Arab politicians is mixed. Iraqi Islamic Party's Ayad al Samarai said the situation could quickly return to "normal" if the violence ends soon. However, fellow Tawafuq member Hassan al Bazzaz, referring to the new Council of Representatives, told PolOff "Seats mean nothing now. Guns mean something." End Summary.

¶2. (C) The three leaders of the Sunni Arab Tawafuq Coalition, Adnan Dulaymi, Khalif Alayan and Tariq al-Hashimi, refused to join President Talabani February 23 in a gathering of top Iraqi government officials to discuss solutions to the sectarian violence resulting from the February 22 mosque bombing in Samarra. Instead, they delivered a letter to Talabani demanding Prime Minister Jafari take responsibility for bringing calm to Iraq. Their demands included (a) a clear denunciation by the government of all attacks of any kind and using even a three-day curfew if needed to restore law and order; (b) returning mosques occupied by gangs to their rightful owners; (c) pledging to repair damaged mosques; (d) compensating the IIP for damage to its offices and compensating victims and their families; (e) political parties to halt their incitement and especially the programming on al-Furat and al-Fayha satellite TV channels; (f) freeing persons kidnapped by armed gangs during the violence; (g) an urgent government investigation to determine those responsible for the Samarra bombing. In a public statement, Secretary General of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) Tariq al Hashimi accused the Shia Islamist Coalition and Sadrists of attacks on Sunni mosques throughout Iraq.

¶3. (C) IIP,s Ayad al Samarai told PolOff privately that Tawafuq would likely return to government discussions as soon as they get a positive response to their demands. Samarai said the political leaders must condemn violence against Sunni mosques and protect Sunni areas. If the violence decreases, he continued, &then the next step will be easy." He added the Tawafuq leaders would likely meet Talabani February 24. Samarai told PolOff that Sunni leaders had tried to protect Shia mosques and had hoped the Iraqi Police and Army would do the same. Samarai accused Iraqi Security Forces of having threatened Sunni mosques and not aiding those who requested help. As an example, Samarai said that in the Jamiyah area of Baghdad, National Guard troops went to the Mullah Waysh mosque and wrote on the walls that the mosque was closed. He said this caused the Sunni Arab leaders

to send their own armed personnel to the mosque. Samarai lamented that the Sunni leaders did not have enough people to provide this protection at every mosque.

¶4. (C) Tawafuq member and University of Baghdad Professor of International Relations Hassan al Bazzaz asked for USG efforts to influence PM Jafari and Grand Ayatollah Sistani. Bazzaz said he wanted the USG to pressure Minister of Defense Sa'adoun Dulaimi to recruit more former Iraqi Army officers. When PolOff countered that there has been an ongoing recruiting effort with just that goal, Bazzaz replied Dulaimi's leadership has been too slow and that the MoD has not recruited effectively.

¶5. (C) Bazzaz explained that the Tawafuq leaders refused to attend Talabani's event because the Tawafuq are working from a position of weakness. "They (Shi'a leaders) have all the guns and power." When PolOff countered that the Tawafuq now has power through their Council of Representative seats and broader alliances, Bazzaz replied, "Seats mean nothing now. Guns mean something."

¶6. (C) Sunni Arab leaders expressed divergent opinions regarding possible action by Coalition Forces (CF). Abdul Nasir al-Janabi - Iraqi National Dialogue Council (ICND) member and newly elected to the Council of Representatives - pleaded with PolCouns for Coalition Forces to patrol Baghdad. The political process was under direct threat because of the violence, he warned. PolCouns replied the USG wants the political process in Iraq to succeed, but deploying troops under these circumstances would likely lead to Sunni extremists battling CF. Janabi conceded the problem and said he would ask the Sunni Arab religious leadership to issue a statement renouncing retaliations by Sunni extremists.

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(Comment: Al-Janabi in the past was at the forefront of those calling for the withdrawal of CF from cities. End Comment.)

¶7. (C) Mithal al-Alusi, Council of Representatives member and liberal/independent Sunni, told PolOff that IIP's Tariq al-Hashimi's public comments Feb 22 incited violence. He opined that Coalition Force presence on the Baghdad streets would cause further bloodshed and send the wrong message. He felt the Iraqi security forces must be competent and accountable - starting immediately.

¶8. (C) In Baghdad, Allawi ally Saad al-Janabi told PolOff that MOI Police Commandos had taken over at least one mosque in Adamiyah. (MNF-I has not yet confirmed other reports of alleged mosque raids locally.) IIP's Ala Mekki told PolOff he received several calls February 23 alleging Jaysh al-Mahdi soldiers in Sha'ab and Hiour areas of western Baghdad were taking young Sunni men from their homes "because they're Sunni." He also claimed Sunni mosques were burning in the same areas.

¶9. (C) Regionally, Diyala Provincial Council member Sheik Dhari Thuban traveled to south Buhriz in Diyala province. He confirmed to Diyala SETOff that 47 Sunni and Shia brick factory workers were pulled from their cars and killed February 23. However, in contrast, State Department officers in Anbar, Ninewa, and Salah ad Din provinces reported little violence.

¶10. (C) Comment: Publicly, Tawafuq is putting forward a message of "no discussions" to maintain credibility with their angry and frightened Sunni Arab constituency. Their rhetoric mirrors that of Shia leaders who have made equally inflammatory statements in the aftermath of the attack on the Samara mosque. The ITG and the Coalition are seized with dealing with the violence -- a series of measures has been ordered during several back-to-back MCNS meetings, including one on February 24 (reported septels). The immediate challenge is to get both sides to desist from provocative pronouncements that carry the risk of increasing sectarian violence past the point of no return. Ultimately, we must ensure both sides rejoin the effort to establish a cross-sectarian government. End Comment.

